

Athlete Profile (National)

Philemon Joe Velasquez – Rollin’ On, Every Day

They call him “Rollin’ Joe.” He could just as easily be known as “*Kind Hearted Joe*,” “*Gentle Joe*” or just plain “Joe.” Regardless of the moniker he is given, Philemon “Rollin’ Joe” Velasquez is one of the most altruistic men you’ll ever meet.

At the 2007 National Veterans Wheelchair Games, Velasquez was honored with the 2007 Spirit of the Games Award. “I was overwhelmed with emotion and shock,” Velasquez said in his warm, resonant voice. “My emotions ran amuck and I was brought to tears,” he said.

It’s not a surprise to those who know him that Velasquez, 59, was presented with the award. This year, the competition is a testament to Velasquez’s unselfish sportsmanship and his commitment to fellow veterans.

Because of a shoulder injury, Velasquez will not be able to compete in the slalom, his favorite event. “It’s a big loss in my heart not to compete in the wheelchair slalom,” he laments. “But I’ll still be there cheering others on,” he said, knowing what a challenge the timed obstacle course can be. It’s that beneficent nature that endears him to so many.

Although Velasquez has a big heart, he is still a fierce competitor. “I don’t go to lose,” he said with a chuckle. “I am the epitome of the competitor.” His performance at the 2007 Games reiterates his desire to win. Velasquez won five gold medals in all five events he entered: two for swimming, nine-ball, slalom and table tennis. He has his own philosophy on the human passion to win too, “Competing and winning inspires us all to stay healthy,” he said.

Velasquez joined the Navy in 1970 and served for almost 14 years before being medically discharged. His dedication to helping others continues. A member of nine veterans’ organizations, he recently became the Athletes’ Liaison for Games, appointed by the Department of Veterans Affairs. He describes his new position as “the show and tell guy for the veterans.”

As you might expect, family is very important to Velasquez. This year, he will move with his wife, Teresa, from their home in Turlock, California, to the state of Washington so they can be closer to three of their four children. “Family comes first,” he said. (Ironically, the move will also bring him closer to the location for next year’s Wheelchair Games in Spokane.)

With his relaxed demeanor and soothing voice, Joe Velasquez ponders his place in life. “Reality is what it is,” he said with an air of content. “I look forward to every day.”

